

# **Islamic psychology: metatheoretical issues and implications**

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### **DECLARATION**

**I the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this assignment is my own original work and has not previously, in its entirety or in part, been submitted at any university for a degree**

## ABSTRACT

Before one can articulate the theory and practice of Islamic psychology, or speak of its relationship to, or integration with, secular psychology, it is imperative that its metatheoretical underpinnings be articulated and understood from the outset. It is argued that this is especially important for the reader steeped in the Western scientific tradition, since its secular metatheory has proved insufficient in accommodating the Islamic worldview. Psychology in Islam is preoccupied with the afterlife – as a result, the subjects of mental disorder and psychotherapy are heavily invested with religious and moral significance. Mental disorder refers to such traits as lead to personal destruction in the hereafter, while psychotherapy entails both the observance of all (external) religious obligations as well as the (internal) purification of the self. This paper demonstrates firstly that Islamic psychology is a legitimate intellectual domain. That, secondly, from an Islamic perspective, psychological theory is useless and dangerous without a pious practitioner, and, thirdly, that the methodological hierarchy that yields psychological theory is the opposite of its secular version. Lastly, it is argued that while Sunni Islam dismisses the notion of free will, this in no way diminishes the relevance of Islamic psychology.

## OPSOMMING

Voordat die teorie en praktyk van 'n Islamitiese sielkunde uiteengesit kan word, en voordat daar sprake kan wees van die verwantskap of integrasie hiervan met sekulêre sielkunde, is dit noodsaaklik dat die metateoretiese onderbou daarvan uiteengesit en begryp moet word. Dit word aangevoer dat dit veral belangrik is vir die leser wat gewoone is in die Westerse wetenskaplike tradisie aangesien die sekulêre metateorie van laasgenoemde nie voldoende is om die Islamitiese wêreld beskouing te akkomodeer nie. Sielkunde binne Islam is behep met die lewe in die hiernamaals met die gevolg dat die onderwerpe van geestesversteuring en psigoterapie swaar gelaai is met godsdienstige en morele oorwegings. Geestesversteurings verwys na sodanige eienskappe wat tot vernietiging in die hiernamaals sal lei, terwyl psigoterapie die nakoming van alle eksterne godsdienstige verpligtinge sowel as die interne reiniging van die self veronderstel. Hierdie tesis demonstreer, eerstens, dat Islamitiese sielkunde wel 'n legitieme veld van intellektuele ondersoek is. Tweedens, word daar, uit 'n Islamitiese perspektief, aangedui dat sielkundige teorie gevaarlik en nutteloos is

sonder 'n godsdienstige praktisyn, en derdens dat die metodologiese hiërargie wat sielkundige teorie lewer die teenoorgestelde is van sy sekulêre weergawe. Laastens word daar geargumenteer dat terwyl Sunni Islam die begrip van vrye wil ontsê, word die relevansie van 'n Islamitiese sielkunde nie daardeur ondermyn nie.



**The format of this thesis is in accordance with the requirements of the  
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*In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful*

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## **Introduction**

Every academic discipline, without exception, has its axiomatic postulates, but these are seldom, if ever, articulated – they are simply taken to be true. However, if an attempt is to be made at articulating the parameters of an *Islamic* psychology, then cognisance must be taken of the fact that its foundations present fundamental challenges and differences to other paradigmatic positions within the broad field of psychology. This paper is therefore intended to provide an outline of these by introducing the metatheoretical positions, issues and necessities that underlie the paradigm of an Islamic psychology, and to take as implicit the fact that this process necessarily occurs within, and evokes, the context of the theoretical debates surrounding inter-cultural psychology as a whole.

From the outset it must be stated that the *foundations* of Islamic knowledge have everything to do with the knowledge itself – because the Islamic Weltanschauung is theocentric in the extreme. This is especially true for Islamic psychology, which is unthinkable without its *sine qua non*: Allah.<sup>1</sup>

The Companions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s) observed that, before teaching them the Qur'an, he initiated them in the elements of *faith* (al-Ghazali, 1962: 204). His chief concern, clearly, was not the bookish instruction, but the pious orientation, of their minds. For, without knowing the *foundations* of their theories and practices – that is, their *meta*-theories – there was little point in having those theories and practices *at all*. This didactic strategy of the Prophet (s) is represented in the metatheoretical bias of this thesis, which, since it is an exposition of Islamic metatheory in so far as this pertains to psychology, is concerned primarily and unavoidably with theological matters.

Given the current marginality and, consequently, the perplexing novelty of the epistemological, ontological and methodological positions in Islam when juxtaposed with those in Western thought, a reading of this paper requires a deliberate suspension

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<sup>1</sup> The transcendental focus in Islamic psychology is not unprecedented in Western psychology, whose equivalent field is known as transpersonal psychology (see Gordon-Brown, 1996).



of the criteria usually employed in the appraisal of theoretical papers written from within one of the paradigms that inform mainstream psychological thought and methodology. As far as was possible, this paper is written from an *Islamic* perspective and, as a result, its manner of discourse departs from secular convention, while the relevance of its contents, on first impression, may appear tenuous. While the question of relevance is central, and would best be addressed by way of in depth case studies, it lies beyond the scope of this paper and must be held in abeyance for future exposition.

### **Secular psychology and Islamic spirituality**

It is fairly common to hear psychotherapy conceptualised as a latter-day alternative to religion, both in its processes and its outcomes. However, there appears to be a fundamental distinction that is often overlooked, namely that religion is a metatheory, while psychology is not. The metatheory of psychology is *secularism*, and therefore secularism – not psychology – is the counterpart of religion. According to secularism, man is his own frame of reference: he confirms his judgements, values and beliefs by referring them to himself. From a mainstream secular perspective, the senses (positivism), the intellect (rationalism) and liberal democracy (functional atheism) are the metatheoretical touchstones that drive empirical endeavours towards the truth about existence and inform methodologies for healing the psyche. The notion of a Supreme Being is not a necessary component of such endeavours, which, indeed, *threaten* its epistemological identity.

In Islam, secularism amounts to an attitude of thankless unbelief (*kufir*). *Allah* is the primary source of guidance, without Whom the faculties of man are not worth mentioning. Therefore, unlike secularism, there can be no split between the pursuit and use of knowledge and *Allah*. What is more, Islam is by no means alone in viewing this fundamental interdependence as a virtue – this is an eminently ‘Third’ World phenomenon. In an era of globalisation, epitomized by rapid travel and instant communication, the West has been increasingly confronted by the presence of this ‘Other.’ Western intellectuals have set about accommodating the ‘Other’ via the interpretative and critical / constructivist traditions, but these, it is submitted, remain thoroughly secular enterprises. Hermeneutics and ideology critique are concerned



only with what is profane, since it is the “Other” as *human* that is sought. Consequently, in seeking to explain the “Other” *in terms of what is already familiar*, transactions with the Muslim world have remained deeply problematic. In short, Western scientific thought has been unable to produce an authentic understanding of Islam primarily because it lacks a framework capable of comprehending Islamic metatheory *on its own terms*.

Secular metatheory – that seeing, reasoning and agreeing are believing – seldom sees the light of day. Over centuries, it has become so ‘obviously’ true that it is now an established *lingua franca*, not in need of explanation. But it should not be forgotten that, not so long ago, it *wasn’t* all that obvious. Rational science was once the work of ‘heretics’ who were routinely burnt at the stake for speaking this language. That is the nature of the predicament now encountered in Islamic metatheory, in which *Allah* is man’s frame of reference. For the reader steeped in the tenets of Western scientific thought, no *lingua franca* is at hand – hence the need for this paper, which will attempt, where possible, to provide one.

Psychology – along with sociology and anthropology – forms the theoretical bedrock of the human and social sciences (Ali, 1999). *Islamic* psychology, in particular, emerged in response to the Faruqian thesis that appeared in the eighties calling for the “Islamization of knowledge” (Safi, 1993). It entails a synthesis of its forerunner, ‘Islamic spirituality,’ which has existed as a systematized discipline for well over a millennium, with those elements of secular psychology that are compatible with Islamic dogma. However, despite a proliferation of websites devoted to writings on Islamic psychology, syncretic attempts appear to have fallen short in two respects. Firstly, Muslim apologists – many of whom have never received professional training in psychology – have tended to focus on the details of Islamic spirituality to the virtual exclusion of secular psychology (e.g. Karim, n.d.).<sup>2</sup> Secondly, when genuine synthesis has been attempted, the results have been unedifying (e.g. Hussain, n.d.), in main due to the absence of an explicitly *metatheoretical* description of the field –

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<sup>2</sup> The reverse is equally true: Muslim psychologists that *have* had the benefit of professional training are by-and-large either unaware of, or indifferent to, their Islamic legacy.



which is of cardinal importance in any discipline still in its formative stages. This paper represents an attempt at rectifying this last and most important shortcoming.

Because the connection between Islamic spirituality and secular psychology has not been articulated meaningfully, the boundaries of Islamic psychology are as yet undefined. What is more, secular definitions of psychology are themselves diffuse and difficult to reconcile, with all of cognition, emotion, behaviour, discourse, systems and many others having been advanced as the proper domains or foci of investigation. Some critics have been vocal on the consequences of this lack of clarity. In the words of Hillman & Ventura (1993), “We’ve had a hundred years of psychotherapy and the world’s getting worse.” And since there is this lack of unanimity in the West on what psychology is, the task of knowing what an *Islamic* psychology will look like, seems all the more daunting.

However, since Islamic psychology must in any event be solidly rooted in Islamic spirituality, it is possible to articulate the former from this established perspective.<sup>3</sup> If anything, this bias, if articulated without apology, may actually function in the interests of the desired synthesis, since there are definite points of convergence with secular psychology. For example, Islamic spirituality has elevated the concepts of *ruh*, *nafs* and *qalb* above all others, and these, remarkably, correspond to, the three elements in Freud’s structural model: the superego, id and ego. More specifically, the transcendental *ruh*, which is divine in origin, represents the conscience or superego; the animal *nafs* refers to carnal passions or id; while the rational *qalb* mediates, as does the ego, between the two.

Al-Ghazali’s (1991) *Ihya ‘ulum al-din* is regarded by Sunni Islam to be the leading work on Islamic spirituality. He considers the discipline to be *‘Ilm tariq al-akhirah* (“the science of the road of the hereafter”), which he divides into *‘Ilm al-mu’aamalah* (“the science of practical religion”) and *‘Ilm al-mukaashafah* (“the science of revelation”). For the purposes of orientation a brief outline of these fields is in order.

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<sup>3</sup> Given the extent of their metatheoretical differences, the weightier contribution of Islamic spirituality in relation to that of secular psychology is to be expected – so much so that Islamic *spirituality* (and not Islamic *psychology*) is technically a more fitting description of the discipline whose introduction is here intended. Not only are its connotations more religious, but, conversely, it also frees one of the secular mindset instinctively adopted at the mention of the word ‘psychology.’





*‘Ilm al-mu‘aamalah* comprises the knowledge of the aetiology, expression and treatment of ‘mental disorder’: whomsoever masters it, strengthens his case on the Day of Judgement and eases his way in the hereafter. This is because ‘mental disorder’ is defined not purely in terms of a man’s shortcomings in this life, but in terms of how it affects his prospects in the next. As a result, it includes such traits as lust, ambition, hypocrisy, pride, niggardliness, fear of poverty, vanity, envy, deceit, loquacity, cruelty, haste, harshness and many others too numerous to mention (al-Ghazali, 1962: 49-50).<sup>4</sup> Aetiologically speaking, these states are precipitated by the whisperings of both men and jinns, with al-Shaytaan (‘Satan’) as the whisperer-in-chief who incessantly calls the souls (*nufu*) of men to evil.<sup>5</sup> ‘Mental disorder’ can be ‘ego-syntonic’, in which case a man’s soul both commands and delights in evil (*al-nafs al-ammarah*), or ‘ego-dystonic’, when the soul at least chastises itself for its transgressions (*al-nafs al-lawwamah*).<sup>6</sup> ‘Mental health,’ by contrast, involves the cultivation of such attributes as fortitude, generosity, resignation, hope, truthfulness, piety, morality and so forth (al-Ghazali, 1962: 49).

‘Psychotherapy’ is the remembrance of Allah in thought, word and deed. *Exoteric* ‘psychotherapy’ entails the observance of all religious obligations of which the most important are the verbal assent to the Lordship of Allah (and none other) as well as the Prophethood of Muhammad (s), the performance of the five daily prayers, almsgiving, fasting and the completion of the *Hajj* (Pilgrimage). Right practice, however, is inseparable from right *belief*, which is the realm of *esoteric* ‘psychotherapy’. Here the concern is with the *qalb* (‘heart’) – the seat of understanding – and in particular, the insulation of one’s thoughts against the satanic whisperings.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The Islamic definition of psychopathology is framed in terms of *moral* deficiency, or deficits in character. It goes without saying that none of the listed traits would find their way into any nosological manual in western psychology, whose conception of psychopathology is almost entirely *amoral*.

<sup>5</sup> See al-Qur’an, 6:112 & 114:4-6. Anas bin Malik reports that the Prophet (s) said: “Verily, al-Shaytaan runs in the son of Adam like the running of the blood” (al-Bukhari & Muslim, cited in Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*, Vol. IV, p. 575).

<sup>6</sup> See al-Qur’an 12:53 & 75:2.

<sup>7</sup> The satanic whisperings may be likened to the automatic thoughts of cognitive therapy (Beck, 1995). They are emotionally distressing distortions of reality that must ultimately be replaced with functional core beliefs – that is, right Islamic beliefs (*‘aqidah*).



The benefits of practical religion, however, are not only enjoyed in the afterlife; practical religion is the believer's gateway to the spiritual unveiling that is the object of *'Ilm al-mukaashafah*. This unveiling is the prerogative of the elite who come to know, amongst other things, the essence of Allah, the meaning of prophecy, the need for revelation, the reason for creation, the truth about al-Shaytaan, the nature of the angels and devils, the subtleties of the heart, and the trials of the hereafter. The unveiling offers its seeker the answers to all of man's most searching questions – but its contents are not to be found in any book (al-Ghazali, 1962: 46-49).

It is expected of an Islamic psychologist that he should have mastered the science of practical religion, while his patient must strive to master it. More than anything, the psychologist is a spiritual guide to the patient along this “crowded and dangerous path of the hereafter” (al-Ghazali, 1962: 2). Because the threat of Hell is never quelled, the struggle is lifelong, but in proportion to the perils, delights await that surpass the most fanciful conceptions.

In the final analysis, it would appear as if Islamic spirituality is nothing other than practical Islam – one wonders, therefore, in light of the redundancy factor, whether there is place, in Islam, for Islamic psychology. It is this paper's working assumption that there is indeed place, since Islam itself, as a site of continued intellectual contest, remains open to a variety of interpretations. While Islamic spirituality has traditionally been deemed the territory of the pacifist Sufis who wage the ‘greater’ *jihad* against the self, the reformist Wahhabis, amongst others, have recently begun to press claims of their own.

Allah-willing, the remainder of this paper will examine four themes. The first will seek to ascertain the permissibility of an Islamic psychology, and will, in so doing, underscore the importance, in Islam, of ensuring piety in all endeavours – *especially* the intellectual ones. The second section pursues the notion of useful knowledge, which is, again, an intrinsically moral question. Thereafter, methodological issues will be explored, which is followed by an account of the Islamic perspective on free will and predetermination, along with its implications for an Islamic psychology. In one way or another, these are all metatheoretical discussions about right belief, but their



importance to the present cause is indispensable, as is demonstrated in the following clinical scenario.

*In his first appointment with a psychologist, a suicidal young man begins with an account of his wife's passing several years prior. After the necessary history taking, a psychodynamic understanding of his complaints is formulated and a diagnosis of 'Major Depressive Disorder' is made. A treatment contract is negotiated and a therapeutic process ensues, which involves the secular interpretation of his psychological difficulties. The young man's recovery is facilitated by his growing insight into the significance of the lost object.*

While this is an outline of the usual course of events in secular psychotherapy, the Islamic position occupies another plane altogether. The Islamic psychologist will argue that temporal interpretations are harmful to both psychologist and patient, since, in Islam, true knowledge increases piety. Accordingly, the Islamic psychologist chooses instead to reassure his patient that the latter's object love results from the idolatrous whisperings of al-Shaytaan – idolatrous because they call to the worship of an object besides Allah; *both* men are then reminded of the incomparable greatness of Allah and take refuge in it. Furthermore, the secular psychologist's understanding of a presenting problem is typically based on absolute reason, which, in Islam, is the weakest method of all. Finally, the question of divine predetermination – and the implied futility of despair – does not feature in the secular psychologist's considerations. However, it does not follow from these objections that Islamic psychology is inherently anti-modern – in the main, it is the secular disavowal of the divine with which it takes issue. Central to the articulation of an Islamic psychology is the *credible* assimilation of secular psychology into Islamic spirituality, in so far as that remains a coherent possibility.

### **Legitimacy**

The highest virtue in Islam is *taqwa* (God-consciousness). Irrespective of the circumstances, a Muslim must endeavour to approach all events in a suitably religious frame of mind – whether he is driving a car, entering his house or even looking in the mirror. At the very least, he should begin every act by invoking the name of Allah



and, in so doing, alert himself to the moral dimensions of his conduct. By the same token, it is also required that his *intellectual* efforts conform to the ethical code of Islam – hence the immediate requirement to establish from the outset the *permissibility* of an Islamic psychology.

According to the Qur'an, the infallible religious text of the Muslims and the inimitable Word of the One Sovereign God, the purpose of existence is this:

*I have only created Jinns and men that they may worship Me.*

(al-Qur'an, 51:56)

For Ibn al-'Arabi, who cites the authority of no less a figure than Ibn 'Abbas, what is meant by the 'worship' of Allah, is the *knowledge* of Him.<sup>8</sup> But such formulaic simplicity can be misleading, because, as al-Ghazali (1969) points out, before that knowledge can be attained, it is firstly the Spirit (*al-Ruh*) that must be known. That is the key to knowing the self (*nafs*), and in the supposed words of the Prophet (s):

*He who knows his self, knows his Lord.*

Lodged deep within the popular imagination, this much-celebrated 'Tradition' asserts the incomparability of self-knowledge. However, the verdict of the specialists is unambiguous: the attribution of such a proverb to the personage of the Prophet (s) is spurious. It bears the unmistakable mark of Greek thought, as also happens to be the case with another fabricated saying that names the first creation of Allah as the "Intellect." Simply put, it is in keeping to the Neoplatonic conceptions of man as microcosm and God as immanent that, in knowing himself, man can come to know the universe and, finally, God Himself (Mohamed, 2000). What these forgeries share, then, is the allusion to a worldview that, within the Muslim community, is distinctive of Sufi cosmology. In particular, upon due scrutiny of its philosophical heritage, monistic Sufism would appear to owe Plotinus and his theory of emanation with its "dynamic pantheism" a debt of gratitude (Goldziher, 1910: 135).

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<sup>8</sup> See Chittick's (1989) *The Sufi path of knowledge*, which is a partial translation of and commentary on selected works of Ibn al-'Arabi.



Yet Ibn al-‘Arabi, the acknowledged guru of Sufi doctrine, thinks otherwise. For him, while the *transmission* of the disputed Tradition may be tainted, its *content* is not. Consequently, in view of that fact that, in its etymological rendition, ‘psychology’ corresponds to the study of the psyche, self, soul or spirit, *it must also correspond to the very pinnacle of what is knowable*. Now, in the Islamic tradition, these terms are as equivocal as they are interchangeable, which is easily gleaned from the ubiquitous disagreements among students of Islam. But the point to be made here is this: according to al-Ghazali, it is unthinkable that the enigmatic Spirit, *al-Ruh*, should be unveiled before an uninitiated public. And that is enough to stop this thesis dead in its tracks. For, without the Spirit (*al-Ruh*), the self (*al-Nafs*) cannot be known, which does away with the *raison d’être* of psychology.

*Orthodox Islam regards Ghazali as the final authority. His name has been a watchword in the struggle against tendencies hostile to the ijma’.*<sup>9, 10</sup>

(Goldziher, 1910: 162)

The principle that informs al-Ghazali’s uncompromising stance, which is plainly evident in his most influential work *Ihya ‘ulum al-din*, derives from his interpretation of a crucial passage from the Qur’an:

*They ask thee (O Muhammad) concerning the Spirit. Say: “The Spirit is of my Lord’s command. Of knowledge, it is only a little that is communicated to you.”*

(al-Qur’an, 17:85)

For al-Ghazali, there is a prophetic precedent here: the nature of the Spirit (*al-Ruh*) is a topic that is not open to discussion, and the (then) nascent Muslim community faithfully resigned itself to this impasse. What *is* up for discussion, though, is whether or not it is actually the *human* spirit to which reference is here being made. For,

<sup>9</sup> As others have done before him, Watt (1963) goes so far as to insinuate that, after the Holy Prophet (s), al-Ghazali is the greatest Muslim of all time. This is an important theme in Islamic epistemology, that is, the deference accorded the opinions of certain personalities. It is a prominent feature of this paper, too, but will not be treated as a topic in its own right. The charge of uncritical hero-worship, however, is flatly denied, which should become clear in the ensuing discussion.

<sup>10</sup> The term *ijma’* has been defined in a number of ways. In its most nebulous sense it is understood as the consensus of the *ummah* (Muslim community); according to a more conservative conception, it represents the unanimous agreement of the acknowledged authorities on matters of jurisprudence.



despite the overwhelming tendency of Islamic scholars (amongst whom the exemplary al-Ghazali is numbered) to understand this Arabic *al-Ruh* as an allusion to the human spirit, this is by no means the only possible interpretation. For example, some of the earliest exegetes, among whom are numbered the likes of Ibn ‘Abbas, Qatadah and al-Hasan al-Basri, were of the opinion that *al-Ruh* referred to the angelic spirit – in particular, the Archangel Jibreel. And of even greater significance is the celebrated commentator al-Tabari’s assertion that this was Ibn ‘Abbas’s privately held conviction – to be distinguished from the one he professed in public. If this is true, one wonders why the man should have professed different opinions to different audiences on what appears to be a fairly innocuous matter.

The ‘public’ opinion of Ibn ‘Abbas, then, as reported in the *Tafsir* of Ibn Kathir, is provided by al-‘Awfi, who quotes him as having thus described the circumstances surrounding the revelation of (17:85):

*This was when the Jews said to the Prophet (s): “Tell us about the Ruh and how the Ruh will be punished that is in the body – for the Ruh is something about which only Allah knows, and there was no revelation concerning it.”*<sup>11</sup>

This account seems more or less consistent with the one reported in the *Tafsir* of al-Bukhari, the context of which, as Ibn Kathir notes, points to Madinah as the scene upon which (17:85) descended:

*Narrated Abdullah (bin Mas‘ud): “While I was in the company of the Prophet (s) on a farm and he was reclining on a palm-leaf stalk, some Jews passed by. Some of them said to the others, ‘Ask him about the Ruh.’ Some of them said, ‘What urges you to ask him about that?’ Others said, ‘Don’t, lest he should give you a reply which you dislike.’ But they said, ‘Ask him.’ So they asked him about the Ruh. The Prophet (s) kept quiet and did not give them an answer. I knew that he was being divinely inspired so I stayed at my place...”*

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<sup>11</sup> These words can also be found in the commentary of al-Tabari (Vol. IX, p. 156).



Ibn Ishaq's version, however, does not coincide with either of these reports. In his biography of the Prophet (s), the question of *al-Ruh* was only one of three that were posed to the Prophet (s) when he was still in Makkah – and it was not the Jews, but his own Qurayshi tribesmen who interrogated him.<sup>12</sup> That there *was* a Jewish connection is not disputed: it involved the rabbis of Madinah, who devised for these scriptureless idolaters this acid test of the Prophet's (s) truthfulness. However, at no point in his narrative does Ibn Ishaq suggest that the *Ruh* under consideration was a *human* one.<sup>13</sup>

As regards the contested *site* of the revelation, a reconciliatory attempt by Ibn Kathir offers two alternatives: it was either the case that the identical verse was revealed on two occasions, or that the Prophet (s) was divinely inspired to respond to his questioners with an already extant verse.<sup>14</sup> But as to the more pressing concern of the meaning of *al-Ruh*, Ibn Kathir appears to reserve judgement in a commentary that is more inclined to description than prescription.

In terms of the aforementioned works of Ibn Kathir, Ibn Ishaq, al-Tabari and al-Bukhari, then, it is only the 'public' opinion of *Ibn 'Abbas* that specifically ascribes to the *Ruh* of (17:85) its human connotation. And yet, one cannot help but wonder if those were really his words.<sup>15</sup> It seems inconceivable that the Jews, in addition to the basic question, should have further remarked that

*... the Ruh is something about which only Allah knows, and there was no revelation concerning it.*

For, in uttering such words, they were articulating the very *answer* to their question – that there *is* no revelation concerning the *Ruh*. And that is precisely what the Prophet (s) told them:

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<sup>12</sup> For the other two questions, see also al-Tabari, vol. IX, p. 155.

<sup>13</sup> It is unclear why Gianotti (2001) thinks otherwise.

<sup>14</sup> The former seems the less likely of the two possibilities – otherwise the verse should have occurred at two places in the Qur'an.

<sup>15</sup> In his *Al-Ruh*, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah traces six different accounts dealing with the revelation of (17:85) to Ibn 'Abbas. The degree of discordance leads him to go so far as to reject all six versions.



... *Of knowledge, it is only a little that is communicated to you.*"

Surely the Jews, spurred on by a keen scepticism, would have desisted from, as it were, offering the answer on a platter. The whole point of the exercise was, after all, to test the genuineness of Muhammad's (s) prophetic mission. What is more, the words "that is in the body" indicate that the Jews were fully aware that the *Ruh* needn't have a human locus, but could be angelic, too. But why spell it out as the *Ruh* that is *in the body* – surely it is only such a *Ruh* that can be punished anyway, given the undisputed purity of the angels? Allah knows best.

This dogged insistence on unearthing the views of Ibn 'Abbas in particular, is not without intent. He is regarded as the finest exegete of them all, which guarantees any pronouncement of his a certain measure of esteem. But he also happens to be the cousin of the Prophet Muhammad (s), and it has been recorded in an authentic Hadith that the latter (s) specifically invoked Allah to grant his young kinsman the insight that was indispensable for Qur'anic exegesis:

*O Allah! Bestow on him (Ibn 'Abbas) the knowledge of the Book.*

(al-Bukhari)<sup>16</sup>

By virtue of this supplication, then, Ibn 'Abbas was automatically singled out as, potentially, an outstanding talent in the science of interpretation, and in life, he would prove his extraordinary intellectual prowess. But, one is led to believe, reputation alone is no criterion for brute fact. After all, most of the exegetes of that era disagreed with his 'private' opinion and even today, the opinion of the greater Muslim community is at odds with that of Ibn 'Abbas. Moreover, the Prophet (s) is also recorded to have said that his *ummah* would never unite on an error.<sup>17</sup>

Nonetheless, Maududi has in more recent times arrived at a conclusion identical to the one submitted by this illustrious minority, and it is the *method* of his argument –

<sup>16</sup> *Sahih*, Vol. I, Kitab al-'Ilm, No. 75.

<sup>17</sup> Al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan*, Vol. III, No. 2255, p. 315; Ibn Majah, *Sunan*, Vol. II, No. 3950, p. 1303; Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, Vol. V, p. 145. In Sunni Islam, this is the Tradition according to which the classical jurists assert the infallibility of the consensus of the Muslim community.



which is not dissimilar to that favoured in Rahbar's (1960) provocative thesis – that persuades the present author of its ultimate veracity. Maududi deploys a form of reasoning that draws in the surrounding context of the disputed verse (17:85), and argues that the passage is located within a sequence of verses that would suggest the denotatum of an angelic, rather than human, spirit.

*We send down (stage by stage) of the Qur'an that which is a healing and a mercy to those who believe: to the unjust it causes nothing but loss after loss.* (82)

*Yet when We bestow our favours on man, he turns away and becomes remote on his side (instead of coming to Us), and when evil seizes him he gives himself up to despair!* (83)

*Say: "Everyone acts according to his own disposition: but your Lord knows best who it is that is best guided on the Way."* (84)

*They ask thee (O Muhammad) concerning the Spirit. Say: "The Spirit is of my Lord's command. Of knowledge, it is only a little that is communicated to you."* (85)

*If it were Our Will, we could take away that which We have sent thee by inspiration. Then wouldst thou find none to plead thy affair in that matter as against Us,* (86)

*Except for Mercy from thy Lord, for His Bounty is to thee (indeed) great.* (87)

*Say: "If the whole of mankind and Jinns were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support."* (88)

*And We have explained to man, in this Qur'an, every kind of similitude. Yet the greater part of men refuse (to receive it) except with ingratitude!* (89)

*They say: "We shall not believe in thee, until thou cause a spring to gush forth for us from the earth,* (90)

*"Or (until) thou have a garden of date trees and vines, and cause rivers to gush forth in their midst, carrying abundant water,* (91)

*"Or thou cause the sky to fall in pieces, as thou sayest (will happen) against us, or thou bring Allah and the angels before us face to face..."* (92)

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In these verses, Allah is admonishing the unbelievers for their intransigent refusal to acknowledge the Divine Authorship of the Qur'an, as they were demanding, in a manner most disingenuous, that the Prophet (s) delineate to them the intricacies of Revelation. It would therefore have been most unusual had a single verse dealing with the nature of the *human* spirit suddenly intervened in the midst of this chastisement. Besides, it is hardly atypical that the Qur'an should refer to Jibreel as *al-Ruh* (e.g. 16: 102; 26:193; 78:38; 97:4 etc.).

On all matters, for all Muslims, the decision of Allah and His Prophet (s) is the final authority (4:59). The confusion surrounding (17:85) will therefore lead some to the conclusion that it originated in the absence of such a decision. For them, the verse invites rather than seals further debate. It is most fortunate, then, that recourse should be had in the circumstances surrounding the revelation of another passage (2:97-101):

*Whoever is an enemy to Jibreel – for he brings down the revelation to thy heart by Allah's Will, a confirmation of what went before, and guidance and glad tidings for those who believe –* (97)

*Whoever is an enemy to Allah and His angels and prophets, to Jibreel and Mikaeel – lo! Allah is an enemy to those who reject Faith.* (98)

*We have sent down to thee manifest Signs, and none reject them but those who are perverse.* (99)

*Is it not (the case) that every time they make a Covenant, some party among them throws it aside? Nay, most of them are faithless.* (100)

*And when there came to them a messenger from Allah, confirming what was with them, a party of the People of the Book threw away the Book of Allah behind their backs, as if (it had been something) they did not know!* (101)

Al-'Awfi, from whom the 'public' opinion of Ibn 'Abbas has been received (p. 15), narrates further along in that same passage that the Jews asked the Prophet (s) from whom he had acquired (17:85), upon which the Prophet (s) answered that it was Jibreel. The Jews then branded Jibreel as their enemy, following which (2:97-101) was revealed, in which *they* were branded the enemies of *Allah*. However, since the author has already cast in doubt the first half of al-'Awfi's report, this second half must share in its dubiousness.



It is al-Tabari, then, who puts forward an alternative version of events surrounding the revelation of these five verses. Amongst others, he presents two accounts, one from Ibn ‘Abbas and the other from Shahr bin Hawshab al-Ash‘ari, that correspond in every respect bar one.<sup>18</sup> According to these accounts, a group of Jews approached the Prophet (s) and put to him four questions, promising to accept his prophethood if he answered to their liking. The single difference between the two accounts concerns the fourth and final question.

According to Ibn ‘Abbas:

*Tell us now which of the angels is your supporter.*

And Ibn Hawshab:

*Tell us about the Spirit.*

In *both* cases, the Prophet (s) answered “Jibreel.” As it happened, the Jews rejected this answer – as their conception of Jibreel was contiguous with blood and violence – and invited upon their heads the wrath of Allah. In any event, it is Ibn Hawshab’s version that provides the telling breakthrough. The indexicality of *al-Ruh* could not have been lost on the Arabic-speaking Prophet (s) – and yet he didn’t ask for clarification as to which one the Jews had in mind. He simply knew they meant an angelic spirit. In a manner of speaking, he might have reasoned that, in the absence of qualifying clauses such as “that is in the body,” the angelic spirit was by default the intended one.<sup>19</sup> What is more, this selection by default suggests that disputes over the angelic spirit, rather than its human counterpart, were the more frequent and relevant. But Allah knows best.

Although the Prophet’s (s) ‘decision’ on (17:85) has here been reconstructed on the basis of what some will dismiss as circuitous reasoning, several other luminaries may

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<sup>18</sup> The tradition of Ibn Hawshab has also been recorded in the *sira* of Ibn Ishaq (p. 255). The latter learnt it from ‘Abdullah bin ‘Abdul-Rahman bin Abu Husayn al-Makki, who heard it from Ibn Hawshab himself.

<sup>19</sup> The point is that *al-Ruh* in (17:85) also lacks a qualifying clause.



be cited who believed that *al-Ruh* in (17:85) referred to an angel, including ‘Ali bin Abi Talib, the fourth and last of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, or even Ibn ‘Abbas for that matter, who, on the authority of Ali bin Abi Talhah, appears to have said it in public this time.<sup>20</sup> But defence of this sort is unnecessary: epistemologically speaking, the words of the Prophet (s) are not in need of fortification.

It is, then, because of this widespread exegetical oversight that this thesis is, for the moment, allowed to proceed.<sup>21</sup> What has been established is the absence of a Qur’anic injunction against the explication of the human spirit (*al-Ruh*), which renders the knowledge of the self (*al-Nafs*) equally possible. However, this conclusion – that the fundamentals of Islamic psychology are not beyond articulation – must be taken with the proverbial pinch of salt. A central assumption of the Islamic worldview is that, *for certain people*, knowledge remains strictly off-limits – a characteristic that will, doubtless, make the free thinker cringe in horror. Someone like Gianotti (2001), perhaps, who, in spite of underscoring al-Ghazali’s own reticence on the topic, takes it upon himself to decode “Al-Ghazali’s unspeakable doctrine of the soul.” Hence, while (17:85) does not specifically prohibit the study of the human spirit, Islamic psychology may yet prove, in some other respect, to be a blameworthy science. This is demonstrated in the following section.

### **Practising practical religion**

Right action demands right knowledge, and right knowledge demands right action. This is the case with the science of practical religion (*‘Ilm al-mu‘aamalah*), which must be mastered both in thought *and* deed. According to a certain East African aphorism, intelligence without piety is like a tree that grows in the middle of a river – and dies. Al-Ghazali (1962), too, coins the analogy of a man whose salvation rests on the other side of a treacherous stretch of desert. The man, who knows this only too well, establishes the best route to take along with the whereabouts of the various encampments – and *still* he perishes, because he failed to *set out* on his journey. It is

<sup>20</sup> See Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*, Vol. III, p. 61; al-Tabari, Vol. IX, p. 156.

<sup>21</sup> In this particular instance, the authority of an apparent consensus (*ijma’*) has been overruled – an admittedly controversial move. More will be offered in this regard (see below, p. 32, n. 35).



frequently the case that the search for knowledge is not worth the effort, which is the central theme of the present discussion.

Said the Holy Prophet (s):

*O Allah, I seek refuge in Thee from the knowledge which does not benefit...*

(Muslim)<sup>22</sup>

Useless knowledge is dangerous knowledge. *Useful* knowledge, on the other hand, is so called not because of its tendency towards veracity, but on account of its capacity to make you “grow in the fear of Allah, in awareness of your own faults, and in knowledge of the service of your Lord” (al-Ghazali, 1963: 107). Moreover, since useful knowledge lead to piety, the *reverse* also holds: without piety (i.e. practical religion), there is only ignorance, no matter how ‘intelligent’ a person may be.

Upon the one imbued with knowledge, there rests an explicit imperative to act in accordance with it:

*O ye who believe! Why say ye that which ye do not? Grievously hateful is it in the sight of Allah that ye say that which ye do not.*

(al-Qur'an, 61:2-3)

A similar exhortation is to be found in the following words of Ibn Mas'ud, another of the earliest and most esteemed Qur'anic exegetes:

*The Qur'an was revealed in order that men may direct their lives according to its teaching. But instead you have made the study of it your life work.*

(al-Ghazali, 1962: 170)

Or as al-Ghazali himself puts it:

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<sup>22</sup> *Sahih*, Vol. XVII, Kitab al-Dhikr, p. 41.



*The learned man who does not do according to his knowledge is like a sick man who prescribes treatment for others...*

(al-Ghazali, 1962: 170)

The reformation of the self is contemporaneous with the instruction and rehabilitation of others. It is not denied that one man's learning is the next man's redemption, but if it were procured at the loss of his own soul, then he has hastened nothing but his own destruction (al-Ghazali, 1962: 125). Knowledge minus praxis isn't knowledge at all – it is intellectualism at its most insolent. The pious observance of practical religion is at the heart of every believer's knowledge, and it is the unmistakable mark of an Islamic psychologist in the truest sense of that term. It cannot be said, then, that psychology is an implicitly blameworthy science – because that verdict depends on the piety of the practitioner in question. Except, who would admit to falling short of the criterion when it is *because* of that very deficit that he pleads sufficiency?

*How many a person has delved into the sciences and reaped injury therefrom? Had he not meddled in them, his religious standing would have been far better... there are persons for whom ignorance is, in some cases, beneficial.*

(al-Ghazali, 1962: 77)

The *intention* of the knowledge-seeker is the measure of his piety. In this respect, al-Ghazali identifies three kinds of seekers, of which only one attains salvation. Some seek knowledge purely as a means to self-glorification, while others who do the same, do so with a troubled conscience. The former are doomed, while the fate of the latter rests with the decision of Allah. The *third* group, however, upon whom is bliss, have in mind only the countenance of their Lord (al-Ghazali, 1963: 88-89). Knowledge proves beneficial to no one – unless desired purely for the sake of Allah. To desire it for the sake of anything else amounts to the lesser form of polytheism – and, unrenounced, its greater form is an unforgivable transgression (al-Qur'an, 4:48).

Knowledge in Islam is not a human achievement. It is a Divine favour. The failure to *recognize* this is what condemns the knowledge as both useless and perilous (Chittick, 1989).



*(Allah) taught man that which he knew not. Nay, but man doth transgress all bounds, in that he looketh upon himself as self-sufficient.*

(al-Qur'an, 96:5-7)

Man is utterly and unavoidably reliant on his Maker for all things – this is Islam's most essential ontological declaration. The notion of causality is inherently impious: a cause has an effect not because of any logical necessity, but because Allah wills it into being – that is why miracles happen.<sup>23</sup> It is a fallacy that the sun gives warmth because it *must*, or that the clouds bring rain because they *must*, or that knowledge acquisition *must* follow appropriate investigation. For it is not by virtue of his labours that a man attains knowledge – that reward is subject to the Will of Allah.

The foregoing section has demonstrated the intimate link between knowledge and piety. As a Divine endowment, the knowledge of *'Ilm al-mu'aamalah* (practical religion or 'psychological theory') demands both purity of intention and the strictest religious adherence. As is to be expected, it is a prerequisite that every Islamic psychologist should have mastered the *contents* of *'Ilm al-mu'aamalah* – otherwise he is in no position to treat his patient. But if he fails to *live* rightly, then not only does his knowledge become useless, his predicament becomes even worse than that of his patient.

### **The sources of knowledge**

In addition to piety, it is by way of the intellect (*al-'aql*) that *'Ilm al-mu'aamalah* is mastered. In Islam, however, the use of *al-'aql* is something to be restrained: unless exercised in the proper manner, the intellect will defeat the ends in the service of which it had originally been exerted. Consider the case of prayer, for instance, where certain prescribed prayers are longer than others, or, the fact that Muslims are discouraged from eating or drinking with the left hand. Reason cannot explain *why* the Prophet (s) made such recommendations, and is therefore inclined to reject these and

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<sup>23</sup> Or rather, strictly speaking there *are* no 'miracles', because there are no laws: all happenings, 'miraculous' or not, are rooted within the same set of ontological prescriptions. For the philosophers of



many similar aspects of practical religion. This was the downfall of, amongst others, two of the finest Islamic philosophers: al-Ghazali (1963) reckoned as unbelievers both Ibn Sina and al-Farabi, because ‘logic’ led them to the articulation of a philosophical psychology that contradicted the Qur’an.<sup>24</sup> The methodological hierarchy in Islam is the *reverse* of its secular counterpart, and it is in light of this novelty – which some of the most eminent *Muslim* thinkers have failed to appreciate – that the following comprehensive treatment is offered.

The Qur’an makes reference to three kinds of knowledge, each of which outranks another in degree of certainty. The first is certainty of mind (*‘ilm al-yaqin*):

*Nay, were ye to know with certainty of mind, (ye would beware!)*

(al-Qur’an, 102:5)

The second is certainty of sight (*‘ayn al-yaqin*):

*Again, ye shall see it (Hell-fire) with certainty of sight!*

(al-Qur’an, 102:7)

And the third is the absolute Truth (*haqq al-yaqin*):

*But verily it (Revelation) is Truth of assured certainty.*

(al-Qur’an, 69:51)

These are the sources of knowledge, which, in ascending degree of excellence, correspond to intellection, sense perception and revelation. This hierarchy is amply reflected in the now widely accepted formula, *Usul al-Fiqh*, according to which al-Shafi‘i articulated the four roots of Islamic jurisprudence: the Qur’an, the Sunnah, *ijma’* (consensus) and *qiyas* (analogical reasoning). Fazlur Rahman (1965), moreover, makes the crucial observation that these are the underlying principles of *all* Islamic

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yore, the natural philosophy espoused by this position was untenable, but that did not halt its progression from Ash‘arite circles to official Sunnite dogma (Goldziher, 1910).

<sup>24</sup> It is not that logic itself is flawed – al-Ghazali was as opposed to those who threw the baby out with the bathwater. The reliability of logic, defined as syllogistic reasoning, is not open to question – but the



thought, with a single amendment – he subsumes *qiyas* under the broader category of *ijtihad* (independent intellectual effort).<sup>25</sup> Depending on the discipline in question, the respective contributions of these four sources will vary. In mathematics, for instance, greater use will be made of *ijtihad*, and so it is with Western psychology, too: although the subject of investigation has never been agreed upon, “*ijtihad*” has generally been the investigative method of choice.<sup>26</sup> But as regards an *Islamic* psychology, an entirely different set of considerations is at work. With *al-Ruh* as its defining element, Islamic psychology is to be understood in primarily *religious* terms, which automatically consigns it to the realms of the Qur’an, the Sunnah and, to a lesser degree, the *ijma’*. The case for *ijtihad*, as shall be seen, is a decidedly controversial one.

#### ▪ *Al-Qur’an*

The Glorious Qur’an is the undisputed Word of Allah, which makes it both inimitable and infallible:

*Say: “If the whole of mankind and Jinns were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur’an, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support.”*

(al-Qur’an, 17:88)

*That is the Book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear Allah.*

(al-Qur’an, 2:2)

Moreover, Speech, as manifested in the Word of Allah, is one of the Divine attributes. As such, it is eternal, the implication of which asserts the uncreatedness of the Qur’an. And since the Qur’an is not only true but also uncreated, it must be true for all time. In the third Islamic century, when the ‘Abbasid dynasty was in power, it sought to

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tendency of the philosophers to relax its conditions of proof in the less precise matters of religion, certainly is.

<sup>25</sup> *Qiyas* (i.e. analogical reasoning) is a restricted form of intellectual effort, as it can only be exercised if a precedent in either the Qur’an or the Sunnah has been found (al-Shafi’i). See pp. 33-34 for a fuller treatment of this concept.

<sup>26</sup> In secular terms, the affinity of *ijtihad* to rationalist metatheory is to be expected.



base its rule on Shi'i ideas, and it was the Mu'tazilah who provided the rationalist proof for, in particular, the heresy of the created Qur'an. In limiting the all-pervading temporal authority of the Qur'an, such a doctrine would have meant that the 'Abbasid caliphs were free to rule not by the Book of Allah, but by their own discretion.<sup>27</sup> As can be seen, then, the nature of the Qur'an was not a purely theological consideration; the political implications were considerable. And in direct proportion to those implications, the 'Abbasids went so far as to institute a *mihna*, or Inquisition, which demanded the allegiance of certain public officials to the heresy. Only a handful of the latter dissented, notably Ahmad ibn Hanbal, who, in spite of popular sentiment, was publicly flogged for his piety. The *mihna* lasted some twenty years, but it is Ibn Hanbal's doctrine that has prevailed up to the present day (Watt, 1994).<sup>28</sup> The net effect has been the relegation of reason to the sidelines, while the place of revelation as the unrivalled means to knowledge, has ever since remained intact.

▪ *Al-Sunnah*

Second only to the Qur'an, the Sunnah is defined as the sayings (*al-sunnah al-qawliyah* or Ahadith), deeds (*al-sunnah al-fi'liyah*) and tacit approvals (*al-sunnah al-taqririyah*) of the Holy Prophet (s). It represents the Qur'an as *lived*, which 'A'ishah, the wife of the Prophet (s), expressed in the following manner:

*The character of the Apostle of Allah is the Qur'an.*

(al-Ghazali)<sup>29</sup>

Allah Himself has confirmed the binding authority of the Sunnah:

*He who obeys the Messenger, obeys Allah...*

(al-Qur'an, 4:80)

<sup>27</sup> The dangers of whimsically exercised *ijtihad* are self-evident here.

<sup>28</sup> The magnitude of this episode is reflected in Watt's (1994) conclusion that the abandonment of the heresy effectively led to the adoption of Sunni Islam as the official state religion.

<sup>29</sup> *Ihya 'ulum al-din*, Vol. II, Ch. XI, p. 235.



*Ye have indeed in the Messenger of Allah an excellent exemplar for him who hopes in Allah and the Final Day and who remembers Allah much.*

(al-Qur'an, 33:21)

*So take what the Messenger gives you, and refrain from what he prohibits you.*

(al-Qur'an, 59:7)

However, the supremacy of the Qur'an over the Sunnah is uncontested: in an ontological sense, in spite of the considerable reverence that attends the words of a divinely inspired mortal,<sup>30</sup> the Sunnah cannot be mentioned in the same breath as the Word of Allah. This much may be inferred from the words of Zayd ibn Thabit:

*The Apostle of Allah ordered us not to write any of his traditions.*

(Abu Da'ud, *Kitab al-'Ilm*)

The second of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, 'Umar, was of a similar disposition, as he feared that the people would come to favour the Sunnah over the Qur'an – fears that were realized when in fact this did come to pass, albeit most infrequently, in later years. Nonetheless, with passage of time, compilation became inevitable. Today, Sunni Islam recognizes six collections as authoritative: the two *Sahih*'s of al-Bukhari and Muslim, and the four *Sunan*'s of Abu Da'ud, al-Tirmidhi, al-Nasa'i and Ibn Majah, with the *Sahih* collections outranking the rest in degree of authenticity.

However, it is important to point out the objections of the Orientalists, spurious as they have proven to be. Their argument entails the denial of the very concept – never mind the content – of the Sunnah, on the grounds that:

- (i) the Sunnah was in part a continuation of pre-Islamic Arab custom;
- (ii) most of the Sunnah had been articulated through a process of *ijtihad*;
- (iii) the corpus constituted by (ii) was fraudulently attributed to the Prophet
- (s) himself (Rahman, 1965).

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<sup>30</sup> "Your Companion (Muhammad) is neither astray nor being misled. Nor does he say (aught) of (his own) desire." (al-Qur'an, 53:2-3).



With regards to the first criticism, it is naïve to assume that whatever is pre-Islamic is un-Islamic. Moral judgements aside, the objection is in any event quite impractical; it is akin to arguing that, if a man chooses to walk rather than slide along his belly, he has no right to claim it as *his* manner, because everyone before him had already been doing that. On the other hand, the second point is technically true, but the products of *ijtihad* in this case constitute the universally accepted principle of *ijma'*, which confounds the third point.<sup>31</sup> The term “Sunnah” has multiple meanings, which can be seen in Malik’s *Muwatta’*. In that work he occasionally uses the word to indicate the established practice of the scholars of Madinah, and while this may coincide with the Prophetic Sunnah, he can hardly be accused of attempting to pass the two off as equivalents.

The Prophet (s) has condemned the person who falsely attributes words to him:

*He who quotes me in things I have not uttered, let him occupy his seat in Hell.*

(al-Bukhari)<sup>32</sup>

This is why several Companions, including the likes of ‘Umar, al-Zubayr, Sa’d ibn Abi Waqqas and Ibn Mas‘ud refrained from citing Ahadith for fear of falling into error (Mahmassani, 1961). ‘A’ishah, wife of the Prophet (s) and daughter of the first of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, Abu Bakr, reports that her father burnt his own collection of five hundred Ahadith as he was agonizing over the possibility that, if he died leaving behind an inauthentic saying of the Prophet (s), he would have to answer for it (Kaandhlawi, n.d.).

Succeeding generations have not heeded the example of these pious predecessors. A preponderance of forgeries, examples of which were cited at the start of this paper, have instead led to the assimilation of beliefs – often ones of great importance to an Islamic psychology – that are alien to the spirit of Islam. A feeling even arose amongst Muslims that, as long as the *content* of a fabricated Hadith was sound, it could be considered an authentic maxim of the Prophet (s) himself (Goldziher, 1910).

<sup>31</sup> See Fazlur Rahman’s (1965) “*Islamic methodology in history*” for a comprehensive treatment of this debate.

<sup>32</sup> *Sahih*, Vol. I, Kitab al-‘Ilm, Nos. 106-110.



Perhaps this trend emerged out of the growing number of antagonistic partisanships, each seeking the highest possible claim to legitimacy, or out of the genuine concern that the directives of the Prophetic Sunnah did not address the minutiae of daily life. But not all Muslims who felt this latter concern went about fabricating one 'Tradition' after another. Some interpreted the Sunnah (and the Qur'an) through *ijtihad* to arrive at a new corpus of religious knowledge: the *ijma'* (Rahman, 1965).

▪ *Ijma'*

Goldziher (1910) remarks that, because of the difficulty associated with deriving the doctrine of *ijma'* from the Qur'an, its validity was not readily accepted. He relates an anecdote concerning the distinguished al-Shafi'i, who was once asked to produce Qur'anic proof that would corroborate the standing of *ijma'* as a source of law. Al-Shafi'i requested three days to fulfil the request, and when he returned to his students, it was with swollen face, hands and feet that he presented his evidence:

*If anyone contends with the Messenger even after guidance has been plainly conveyed to him, and follows a path other than that becoming to men of Faith, We shall leave him in the path he has chosen, and land him in Hell...*

(al-Qur'an, 4:115)

The argument for *ijma'* is also alluded to in Hadith literature, in which the Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

*Allah will not allow my ummah or the ummah of Muhammad to agree on an error, and Allah's hand is over the community. Whoever disassociates from the community will be cast into Hell.*

(al-Tirmidhi, *Kitab al-Fitan*)

In its broadest rendition, the term, *ijma'*, means 'consensus' or 'agreement.' Faruqi (1992) comments that, in the earliest days of Islam, it was not an explicit principle of the *Shari'ah*, but developed out of practical necessity. The first incident that was referred to *ijma'* for judgment, followed immediately on the passing of the Prophet (s), and concerned the vital issue of succession. Although Abu Bakr was nominated



for the position, it was not without opposition: Sa'd bin 'Ubada, head of the influential tribe of Khazraj, made known a similar aspiration. But that did not prevent the recognition of Abu Bakr as the Prophet's (s) successor, albeit without one man's support.<sup>33</sup> The episode demonstrates clearly that, for the Companions, the finest of all generations, *absolute* unanimity of opinion – i.e. the complete absence of dissent – was not required for the establishment of *ijma'*.

There are, then, three areas of concern that constellate the *ijma'* debate:

- *whose* opinions are to be considered;
- *how* will they all become known; and
- *what* is an acceptable level of agreement?

Ibn Hanbal's interpretation of this doctrine, like that of the Zahiri school, is the strictest of them all: it is only the *ijma'* of the Prophet's (s) Companions that is valid. The implication is that *ijma'*, for Ibn Hanbal, is an historical *fait accompli*; it involves the confirmation – rather than creation – of knowledge, the significance of which does not require emphasis. Malik's view, while less exclusivist, insisted that the Medinese *ijma'* was the only authoritative one, which indicates that, for him, *ijma'* was a *process* (rather than a *culmination*) extending beyond the first generation of Muslims.<sup>34</sup> Al-Shafi'i's take on the matter was also of *ijma'* as a process – but a universal one at that, which was not to be the sole prerogative of Medinese scholars (Mohamed, 1999).

Ibn Hazm raised the more practical problem of *how* to collect the opinions of religious scholars. After all, by his time (the 5<sup>th</sup> Islamic century), Islam had spread far and wide and was no longer an exclusively Arab religion. To this day, Ibn Hazm's dilemma remains unresolved (Mohamed, 1999).

The third issue – the *level* of agreement required to establish a valid *ijma'* – is also fraught with difficulty. As was seen earlier, when the Companions elected Abu Bakr

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<sup>33</sup> Ibn Ishaq provides a detailed account of these proceedings.

<sup>34</sup> Malik held that it was only the scholars of the Prophet's (s) city, Madinah, that could understand the true significance of the Prophetic Sunnah.



as Caliph, it was through *ijma'* by majority rather than unanimity – but this was more the exception to their rule. Al-Shafi'i's exposition of the doctrine was equally uncompromising: in his view, *any* disagreement prevented *ijma'*, a stance that proved unpopular with some pragmatists.

The validity of *ijma'* by majority remains a point of contention.<sup>35</sup> This is perhaps due to a not uncommon interpretation of the Hadith relating to *ijma'* (see p. 17) as proof of the latter's *infallibility*, an idea rejected in some conservative quarters that include the likes of Ibn Hazm and al-Juwayni.<sup>36</sup> The Prophet's (s) reassurance that the *ummah* will disagree on an error does not make it infallible; what the *ummah* has been guaranteed, is negative, as opposed to positive, wisdom. May Allah save one and all from attributing to His Prophet (s) ideas of which he would never have approved, and from denying those of which he did approve.

No matter how conscientious the quibbling, the doctrine of infallibility appears only to complicate matters, and Faruqi (1992) duly lists a variety of arguments to which the jurists resorted in an attempt to dissolve the difficulties that it presented. Al-Shafi'i and Ibn Hazm, for example, only accepted the verdict of *ijma'* if it was based on a text from the Qur'an or Sunnah; since these two sources *are* infallible, any ruling deriving from them must share in that infallibility. *Ijma'* through *ijtihad* (i.e. pure intellectual effort), however, was deemed invalid.

But there appears to be a certain circularity to this line of reasoning. The concept of *ijma'* is of no use when its verdict is already contained in the Qur'an and Sunnah; *ijma'* is meant to provide answers when those two sources *don't*. And when the Qur'an and Sunnah do not address an issue, *that* is when *ijtihad* comes into the reckoning. When an opinion arrived at through *ijtihad* is accepted by the scholars, *ijma'* is established. Even if the *mujtahid* were mistaken in his opinion, according to an authentic Hadith, he is not accountable for his error, but will instead be rewarded by Allah if his heart was pure:

<sup>35</sup> Hence, given the manifest difference of opinion, the earlier dismissal of the so-called *ijma'* regarding (17:85) (see p. 21, n. 21 *supra*).

<sup>36</sup> The reasoning is that, if a *single* scholar were to dissent (and *ijma'* by majority and *not* unanimity were to become the only possibility), the claim of infallibility would be thrown into doubt.



*If a judge gives a verdict according to the best of his knowledge and his verdict is correct, he will receive a double reward, and if he gives a verdict according to the best of his knowledge and his verdict is wrong, even then he will get a reward.*

(al-Bukhari)<sup>37</sup>

Al-Juwayni also presents a persuasive argument. In controversial fashion, he writes that the Qur'an and Sunnah do *not* sanction the authority of *ijma'*. But instead, through *qiyas* (i.e. analogy), he reasons that, because of intergenerational agreements among the 'ulama (who, in many instances, would have had no contact with one another), the reliability of the *ijma'* can be safely assumed.

#### ▪ *Qiyas*

Ibn Seerin is recorded to have said that Iblis was the first to use *qiyas* and that, if it weren't for *qiyas*, man would never have descended to the level of worshipping the sun and moon.<sup>38</sup> When, in violation of Allah's Command, Iblis refused to prostrate before Adam, he cast his protest in the form of an analogy:

*I am better than he: Thou didst create me from fire, and him from clay.*

(al-Qur'an, 7:12; 38:76)

Because of the arrogance of the unrepentant Iblis, Allah cursed him until the Day of Judgement, and generations since have rejected him as al-Shaytaan.

Ibn Seerin's hostility to *qiyas* was not exceptional; on the contrary, that sentiment would soon be taken up by the scholars of the Hijaz region, who came to be known as *Ahl al-Hadith* (the People of Tradition). They presented numerous Qur'anic references in support of their position, of which one will suffice:

*And We have sent down to thee the Book explaining all things...*

(al-Qur'an, 16:89)

<sup>37</sup> *Sahih*, Vol. IX, Kitab al-I'tisaam bil-Kitab was-Sunnah, No. 450.

<sup>38</sup> See Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*, Vol. II, p. 203. Ibn Seerin's pious conservatism is all the more revealing, given that he is sometimes acclaimed as the first Islamic psychologist.



However, a group in favour of *qiyas* also emerged, comprising mainly the scholars of Iraq, amongst whom Abu Hanifa would have been the most prominent figure. They became known as *Ahl al-Ra'y* (the People of Opinion), and, like their opponents, also had recourse to the Qur'an in justification of their views:

*And such are the similitudes We set forth for mankind, but only those understand them who have knowledge.*

(al-Qur'an, 29:43)

This pro-*qiyas* group contended that, in order to grasp the subtlety of a similitude, one had to resort to analogical reasoning. It also insisted that the Companions were unanimous in their implicit agreement concerning the merits of *qiyas*, and that the Prophet (s) was himself an exponent of the technique (see Mahmassani, 1961).

The controversy surrounding *qiyas* seems to stem from an acute awareness of the abuse that may be perpetrated in its name. However, the definition of *qiyas* would appear to safeguard against that, as, according to al-Shafi'i's understanding, it may only be exercised if a Qur'anic or Prophetic precedent already exists, which is in turn applied (by way of analogy) to the particular question at hand. The charge against *ijtihad*, however, is far more serious, as it is unmindful of such precedents. *Ijtihad* is reason at its most absolute. And in proportion to the associated dangers, a *mujtahid* must meet certain conditions in order to practice his science:

*It is a prerequisite that an interpreter (mujtahid) be mature, wise, just and of good character. He should be well versed in: the sources of the shari'ah, the technique of attaining those sources, and such helpful tools as proficiency in the language [i.e. Arabic], exegesis, the causes of the revelation, knowledge of the narrators of traditions, the method of testing the authenticity of traditions, and the principles of repeal of rules.*<sup>39</sup>

(Mahmassani, 1961: 93-94)

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<sup>39</sup> See also Abdul Rahman (1999: 75-76), who lists additional criteria to which the *mujtahid* must adhere.



These, then, in decreasing order of preference, are the sources of knowledge in Islamic psychology: Qur'an, Sunnah, *ijma'*, *qiyas* and *ijtihad*. This is in agreement with the directives of the Qur'an, which affirms the superiority of revelation over both sense perception and reason.<sup>40</sup> Since revelation outranks reason, any contradiction between the two points to the inadequacies of *human* comprehension. Al-Ghazali (1963), for one, has gone to the extent of demonstrating, by way of reasoned argument, the validity of these methodological prescriptions.<sup>41</sup>

It is of critical importance that the Islamic psychologist respects the structures of Islamic methodology, failing which he will transgress as the philosophers did before him. For his own safety, it is better that he be a *mujtahid* in the fullest sense of the word.<sup>42</sup> The discipline itself is so thoroughly religious that the secular approach, which is exemplified by a reliance on empirical and rational methods of investigation, will prove ineffectual. He should instead acquire an intimate knowledge of the sacred texts, their endorsed commentaries and the accepted theological and jurisprudential works before assessing the admissibility of secular psychological theory and practice.

Again, it is worth re-emphasizing that, in spite of the 'inherent' truth-values of revelation, sense perception and intellection, a man may yet profit nothing by them. For, the knowledgeable man who does not *walk* the path of practical religion is doomed to a life of aimless wandering. Indeed, many are they who, despite the faculties of sight, hearing and understanding, in addition to a familiarity with the texts of revelation, die in a state of belligerent disbelief. Sometimes Allah confounds their faculties and their error is increased:

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<sup>40</sup> Sense perception has not been discussed as a possible method of investigation in an Islamic psychology. It is not denied that it could serve as such a method, but that is peripheral to the present argument.

<sup>41</sup> See his *al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* ("Deliverance from Error") for a detailed account of al-Ghazali's disillusionment with knowledge arrived at through sense perception and reason.

<sup>42</sup> See p. 34 *supra* for Mahmassani's (1961) comprehensive definition.



*Allah hath set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing. And on their eyes is a veil; great is the chastisement they incur.*<sup>43</sup>

(al-Qur'an, 2:7)

Alternatively, He causes the Revelation itself to be a source of confusion to them:

*By it (the similitudes of the Book) He causes many to stray, and many he leads into the right path; but He causes not to stray, except those who forsake (the path).*

(al-Qur'an, 2:26)

Or else, He abandons them to their ways:

*We shall leave them in their trespasses, to (stumble blindly).*

(al-Qur'an, 6:110)

None would deny the worthlessness of the knowledge that is never practised – hence the importance of a life lived in the shade of the Shari'ah. The fear of Allah, modesty, humility, asceticism – these are all methodologies in their own rights without which the labours of the mind will come to naught (al-Ghazali, 1962).<sup>44</sup> That much appears to have been proven by the great Islamic scholars, who were first and foremost men of religion.

### **Predetermination**

The point has been made several times over that the knowledge of practical religion, which is the Islamic equivalent of psychology in the West, will have no effect unless it finds expression in the day-to-day lives of the Islamic psychologist and patient. The

<sup>43</sup> The loss of one's faculties is to be understood metaphorically: "Truly, it is not the eyes that grow blind, but it is the hearts which are in the breasts that grow blind" (al-Qur'an, 22:46).

<sup>44</sup> Knowledge begins with the fear of Allah: "But fear Allah, and He will give you knowledge..." (al-Qur'an, 2:282); "Such only of His servants as are possessed of knowledge fear Allah..." (al-Qur'an, 35:28). The Qur'an also provides a telling description of a temperament ill-disposed to learning; it recounts how an initially impatient Musa foiled his own attempts to learn from the wise Khidhr (18:65-82).



assumption, of course, is that one is *free* to act, piously or impiously, according to what one wills – but this is a distinctly secularistic proposition, which, to say the least, is an oversimplification of matters. This section will attempt to clarify the orthodox Islamic position on free will along with the implications for an Islamic psychology.

The question of the human will was the second theological controversy to rock the Muslim community. It erupted at a time when the ruling Umayyad dynasty was seeking to excuse its excesses by appealing to the incontrovertible Decree of Allah. Until then, determinism, which emphasized the omnipotence of Allah above all else, had always been the favoured doctrine of the Muslims, and the rulers duly sought to manipulate the quiescence of their subjects in pursuit of their own objectives. The then radical notion of man's freedom to act, by contrast, underscored the justice of Allah, and the defenders of this new doctrine, spearheaded by the rationalist Mu'tazilah, were known as the Qadariyyah.

There is a psychological subtext to this debate, however, an awareness of which is central to appreciating its full import. Take the Arabic word *qadar*, for instance. It refers to an attribute of Allah that has been translated as 'predetermination' or 'predestination', in spite of the vast difference implied by these two words. After all, Allah *predetermines*, while man is *predestined*. In the first instance, one's sight is fixed on Allah, but in the latter, the focus is on oneself. Both entail specific frames of mind that, it is submitted, influence one's ultimate take on the debate. In particular, those who concentrate on the human perspective, adopt the Qadari doctrine. They assert that Allah is *obliged* to be just; that He is *compelled* to reward and punish when these are 'warranted', that He *is not* permitted to impose on men obligations greater than they can bear; that He *does not* lead men astray, and that He *cannot* author men's evil deeds. Constrained by human conceptions of what it is to be good and just, it is at the expense of Allah's transcendence that Reason is exalted – hence the unsurprising position of those with rationalist inclinations (i.e. the Mu'tazilah) at the forefront of this movement.

By contrast, al-Ghazali's thoughts are with his Maker, and he duly casts the matter in heavily theistic terms. He dissolves the dispute by reconciling its principal elements,



namely the attributes of omnipotence and justice. This he achieves by effectively placing the latter beyond the scrutiny of human reason:

*Tyranny is inconceivable in the case of Allah, for He does not encounter any property of another besides Himself, so that his dealing with it might be tyrannous.*

(al-Ghazali, 1969: 7)

Since they are His possessions to begin with, Allah's treatment of men can never be deemed unjust – only a secularist filled with a sense of entitlement could insist otherwise. Allah is not obliged to reward acts of obedience, while His right to obedience is unquestionable. Mankind, in turn, does not obey Him because reason demands it, but because Allah Himself has commanded and *willed* it. So too does He will (in spite of prohibiting) *unbelief*. If he were to afflict His creatures with all manner of tribulations without them having transgressed in any way, that would be nothing but justice on His part. He is likewise free to burden souls with responsibilities that they cannot bear. The omnipotence of Allah, then, in no way contradicts His justice.

But there is another component that supposedly distinguishes this 'middle-of-the-road' position advanced by al-Ghazali and the orthodoxy from that of sheer determinism, whose proponents were known as the Jabariyyah. It is that, in accordance with His omnipotence, Allah creates in man both his actions and his will. Man, in his turn, 'acquires' those actions, which Allah made voluntary through His Will, by exercising his own will (*istita'a*). As is to be expected, however, this doctrine of *iktisab* ('acquisition') has been criticized in some quarters for failing, really, to explain anything at all. Amongst other things, it holds that the power to act (i.e. 'will') does not precede that act (which is contrary to what one would expect of a truly free will), and that, at a given moment in time, 'will' only necessitates a particular act and no other (i.e. a forced-choice scenario). In effect, then, the notion of *iktisab* pays "lip-service", more than anything else, to the freedom of the will, and actually confirms Allah's supreme control over human affairs (Watt, 1948: 143). It is inconsistent in itself, which the great al-Ash'ari inadvertently demonstrated by rejecting the idea of an act being involuntary even if Allah compelled a man to do it.



In an epistemological and methodological sense, the Qur'an and Prophetic Sunnah must have the final word on this matter (4:59). But before that recourse is to be had, some preliminary remarks are offered. Firstly, it is noteworthy that the Qur'an does not explicitly treat predetermination as a topic in its own right. While it is true that some verses are clearly of deterministic import, that much, it is submitted, is unessential as far as the central message of the Qur'an is concerned. Also, as Goldziher (1910) puts it, prophets are not theologians. Their purpose is not to devise intricate philosophical proofs in defence of revelation, but is rather to convey the revelation itself. In the mind of the believer, the Prophet's (s) words (as is also the case with the Qur'an) are worthy of blind acceptance, which might explain why, as Watt (1948) has remarked, surprisingly few attempts were made by the early scholars to manage what, to the 'free-thinking' Western mind, appear as contradictions between the Qur'an and Sunnah. For Muslims, Ibn Hanbal's trusted aphorism, *bi la kayf* ('without asking how'), is as prudent as it is pious.

Al-Tahawi (1994), however, takes matters a step further. He insists that the precise working of predetermination is Allah's secret, and that no angel or prophet has ever been privy to it, before warning the believer that to even *contemplate* it leads to abandonment, rebellion and misfortune. Anyone who questions the decision of Allah is reckoned a rank unbeliever:

*He cannot be questioned for His acts, but they will be questioned (for theirs).*

(al-Qur'an, 21:23)

It is with this proscription in mind that the following account of predetermination is offered. In venturing no further than pure description, it will not attempt to reconcile any apparent discrepancies. In defence of this conservatism, it is worth remembering that, irrespective of a man's ability to act in a manner that is truly of his own making, he has been commanded by his Maker to live righteously, *whether or not it is in his power to do so*. Predetermined or not, he is never absolved of that responsibility. It is therefore unbecoming that he should resort to protest at the prospect of his possible predetermination; it is better that he humble himself before Allah, the Compeller.



In several passages, then, the Qur'an is nothing short of emphatic in its denial of human agency. Amongst other things, it asserts the immutability of a man's life-term (63:11) and the fixity of his sustenance (11:6). More importantly, righteousness itself is beyond his control:

*Ye shall not will except as Allah wills...*

(al-Qur'an, 76:30; 81:29)

*No soul can believe, except by the Will of Allah...*

(al-Qur'an, 10:100)

*But We saved him (Lut) and his family, except his wife: her We destined to be of those who lagged behind.*

(al-Qur'an, 27:57)

On the other hand, the Qur'an is just as adamant that man *is* the author of his actions:

*... But whatever evil happens to thee, is from thyself...*

(al-Qur'an, 4:79)

*Say: "The truth is from your Lord." Let him who will, believe, and let him who will, reject (it)...*

(al-Qur'an, 18:29)

*Then, on that Day, not a soul will be wronged in the least, and ye shall be repaid according to your past deeds.*

(al-Qur'an, 36:54)

However, the inclination of the Prophet (s) towards predetermination is both more explicit and more pronounced:



*Allah wrote down the decrees regarding the created world fifty thousand years before He created the heavens and the earth.*

(Muslim)<sup>45</sup>

*Adam and Musa argued with each other. Musa said to Adam: "O Adam! You are our father who disappointed us and turned us out of Paradise." Then Adam said to him: "O Musa! Allah favoured you with His talk and He wrote for you with His Own Hand. Do you blame me for action which Allah had written in my fate forty years before my creation?" ...*

(al-Bukhari)<sup>46</sup>

*There is no living soul for which Allah has not appointed its place in Paradise or Hell...*

(Muslim)<sup>47</sup>

Taken in combination, the deterministic overtones of the Qur'an and Sunnah are the more prominent, which has proved unpalatable to many of a rationalist ilk.<sup>48</sup> Watt (1948) and Rahman (1965) are cases in point in that they have resorted to, respectively, psychological and sociological hypotheses in an attempt to explain away a preponderance of evidence to the contrary. The danger with these approaches is that there is always the risk of an ensuing moral laxity, but the Qur'an is dead set against that, urging the Muslims not to despair of the Mercy of Allah (39:53).

At the very least, then, Sunni Islam holds that most, if not all, aspects of a man's life are predetermined; at the same time, no relinquishment of personal responsibility is implied. As a result, one is forced to conclude that *the occurrence and successful treatment of 'mental disorder' are wholly reliant on the Will of Allah*. This position has potentially damaging consequences for an Islamic psychology, since, if everything is predetermined, the relevance of practical religion seems greatly

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<sup>45</sup> *Sahih*, Vol. XVI, Kitab al-Qadr, p. 203.

<sup>46</sup> *Sahih*, Vol. VIII, Kitab al-Qadar, No. 611.

<sup>47</sup> *Sahih*, Vol. XVI, Kitab al-Qadr, pp. 195-196.

<sup>48</sup> One exception is Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, whom Rahman (1965) describes as having been "a theistic predestinarian of a truly frightening order" (p. 101).



diminished. That is to say, 'aetiological' theories along with the praxis of 'psychotherapy', for want of better terms, are therefore unimportant.

There are however cogent reasons for rejecting this position: When the Prophet (s) said that every man's abode in the Hereafter had been sealed, a Companion asked if, in light of that, there was any point to human action. The Prophet (s) then commanded the performance of works, explaining that the people of happiness and unhappiness would simply be guided to the appropriate works. Similarly, when 'Umar ordered the Muslim army to vacate an area struck with plague, he was asked if he was attempting to avoid the *qadar* of Allah. He responded by admitting that, while he *was* fleeing from the *qadar* of Allah, he was also fleeing *to* the *qadar* of Allah (Rahman, 1965).

### **Conclusion**

The underlying tone of this paper has been one of caution. While it has attempted to explore the questions of legitimacy, useful knowledge, methodology and free will, definitive answers have either been withheld at crucial moments, or else, when offered, have tended to discourage further examination. This is because the issues at stake are deeply *sacred*, and as a result, weighing heavily on all of them, is the *moral* burden of delivering the right verdict. What is more, as far as can be told from the conduct of the Companions, the correctness of these verdicts may never be known with any certainty. Not only did the Companions regard *no* answer as superior to the wrong answer – in some sense, it was even better than the *correct* answer.

Take the case of Abu Bakr, for instance, the first Caliph and the man whom Sunni Islam acknowledges as most excellent in piety after the Prophet (s). In spite of sitting continuously in the Prophet's (s) company, he narrated very few Ahadith, a reluctance that derived from his intense fear of misrepresentation (Kaandhlawi, 1984). Or, consider the reaction to the Prophet's (s) entrustment of certain secrets to Hudhayfah – in particular, the one pertaining to the names of the Hypocrites. 'Umar, the second Caliph and one of only ten men to whom the Prophet (s) had promised Paradise, was so perturbed by this that he would pester Hudhayfah, anxious at the thought of possibly having been ranked a Hypocrite (al-Ghazali, 1962: 207). Even when the



jurists among the Companions were presented with a question, each would pass it on to the other until the query had come full circle (al-Ghazali, 1962: 186). In early Islam, *silence* was the mark of true knowledge, but only the pious few that recognised the latter as a Divine endowment were in a position to observe it. In a manner of speaking, *piety demanded the confession of ignorance* – and the corollary of this confession was, of course, the omniscience of Allah.

Pious self-doubt notwithstanding, there is in any event this distinctly anti-intellectual mood that pervades Islamic scholarship. In part, it is that tension which necessitated the detailed discussions on legitimacy, useful knowledge and methodology. The need to authorize intellectual activity, the condemnation of knowledge without practice as well as the relegation of reason to the bottom of the methodological pecking-order all allude to the dangers of brute intellectualism – in particular, its customary disregard for the Shari‘ah. The response of traditional Islamic scholarship to such unchecked liberalism has historically favoured the side of pious caution, which is perhaps the defining mark of these metatheoretical discussions.

With this in mind, a brief summary of the underpinnings of an Islamic psychology – upon which any integration or synthesis with what has been defined as secular psychology must be predicated – is now in order.

Islamic spirituality is divided into *‘Ilm al-mu‘aamalah* (the science of practical religion) and *‘Ilm al-mukaashafah* (the science of revelation). *‘Ilm al-mu‘aamalah* is concerned with the aetiology, expression and treatment of ‘mental disorder.’ It is the Islamic equivalent of secular psychology, while the open communication of *‘Ilm al-mukaashafah* is forbidden. ‘Mental disorder,’ which includes such traits as lust, envy, deceit and pride, is caused by satanic whisperings in the hearts of men, and their eradication requires a combination of exoteric and esoteric ‘psychotherapies.’ The former encompasses the fulfilment of all religious obligations, while the latter entails the purification of *al-Nafs* (the soul). As a result, the objective of ‘psychotherapy’ is the attainment of felicity in the hereafter. It is, therefore, no exaggeration to claim that Islam is psychology.



The argument has also been made that psychology is, in an Islamic sense, a legitimate field of enquiry. The knowledge of the human *Ruh* is its central component, but, contrary to the opinions of al-Ghazali and many others, its verbalization can hardly be deemed forbidden. Consequently, the knowledge of the self (*al-Nafs*) is attainable and the *raison d'être* of psychology is salvaged. The word *al-Ruh*, which occurs in the Qur'an many times over, is never meant in a human sense (Ibn Qayyim, 1984); hence the proscription of (17:85) cannot be regarded as limiting the scope of this and related investigations.

The Islamic psychologist must have mastered *'Ilm al-mu'aamalah* in thought and deed, while that is the noble desire of his patient. If the psychologist is unable to translate his learning into pious thoughts and deeds, then, in reality, he will have learned nothing at all. In fact, since his hypocrisy has only increased his error, it would have been better had he avoided the sciences altogether. Knowledge is to be withheld not only from those incapable of understanding it, but also from those who prove themselves incapable of *using* it (al-Ghazali, 1962: 150).

In Islamic psychology, the sources of knowledge operate in complete contrast to dominant epistemological discourses in Western thought. Pride of place is given to revelation as an unrivalled source of truth – in particular, the Qur'an and Sunnah – and, to a lesser degree, *ijma'* (consensus), while reason in the form of *qiyas* (analogy) and *ijtihad* (rationalism) is assigned the smallest portion of all. Accordingly, for the Islamic psychologist, it is the knowledge of the sacred books, their accepted commentaries and the orthodox works of the jurists and theologians that he must acquire; this knowledge is the criterion against which he must evaluate the permissibility of secular psychological theory and practice. Moreover, for the sake of his religious integrity, he should have mastered the subject of Islamic methodology in all its complexities, which, in effect, accords him the illustrious rank of *mujtahid*. Proficiency in the secular methods of rational and empirical investigation is of secondary significance.

It has lastly been demonstrated that the orthodox Islamic opinion concerning the freedom of the human will borders on sheer determinism. The moral implication is that a man may never attain to piety if this was not ordained for him. But since he has



been commanded to live righteously, even if it is ultimately beyond him, he must attempt to do just that, as the final responsibility for a man's actions rests squarely on his own shoulders. Taken to its fullest, the meaning of this position is that the causes, sequelae and treatment of 'mental disorder' are ultimately not in the hands of men, but of their Maker. However, the Prophetic example does not tolerate despairing idleness – on the contrary, man must create, fulfil and endure his destiny, even if he is nothing more than its instrument.<sup>49</sup> Predetermination, therefore, does not mitigate the importance of *'Ilm al-mu'aamalah*.

On account of its unparalleled preoccupation with the next world, Islamic psychology is arguably the master-science of all Islamic sciences; the task of 'Islamizing' psychology is therefore as urgent as it is daunting. However, this process of Islamization cannot begin without a detailed exposition of the discipline's metatheoretical underpinnings. This paper is an attempted step in that direction.

All praise is for Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

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<sup>49</sup> The same existential question is central to existential-humanist psychology. According to Frankl's (1964) logotherapy, the point is not to ask what the meaning of life is, since it is *life* that asks the questions – and, as is the case with Islam, the appropriate human answer is live responsibly.



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